



Ext. 3308

From the desk of

JOHN WRIGHT

Date 18 Nov 82

Dear Roger

Thanks for the award — and so well deserved! I had the enclosed for the November P-W, to run facing your ad — but (like so many we know) I missed the deadline & Doc wouldn't stretch even a day for me.

Since it'll be in the January issue, I'll revise it a touch & you'll see it there — the world certainly is bright enough to hurt the eyes without those rosy glasses!

Thanks again for your encouragement — and for your patience.

Yours friend,
John

PS with Jack's heart attack, the latest pub-estimate is April or May (or so).

A Long Overdue Review

John D. Wright, NLG

This past January Roger Cohen delivered his eagerly-awaited revision of American Half Cents. This significant work screamed for a careful review, and indeed, a few were written. But I held off for the ultimate-- a 'comparative review' of Roger's and Walter Breen's work on the same subject, announced for simultaneous release. Well, I'm still waiting and it looks like Roger may win his bet (private joke), so let's compare AHC (2nd Edition) with the original AHC. After all, that is the only published work of comparable scope on half cents.

For we large cent nuts, the best analogy is to say "AHC(2E) is to AHC as Penny Whimsy is to Early American Cents". The former was an extremely popular, informative, and readable standard reference on a restricted coinage-series, filling a long-standing vacuum and enlarging the retinue of that series manyfold. The latter, of similar physical size and scope, has completely eclipsed its parent. Sheldon was not the original large cent collector, nor was Cohen the original half cent collector. Neither did the first research in their series. But both are rightfully recognized as the standard authority and popularizer of their series.

To an excellent first-edition base, Cohen has added revised value-factors, more and better pictures, expanded die-state coverage, revised rarity-ratings, a new condition census, and has enlarged the section on the 'other half cents'-- the proofs, restrikes, electrotypes, and other ephemeral issues. Yes, you heard correctly. For the first time there is now a comprehensive publication covering die varieties of the proof-only half cents, including where they were struck (as dated or afterwards), by whose authority, and under what circumstances. This section has been increased tenfold from the first edition, and excellent plates of all "other half cents" have been added.

Unfortunately, relative rarity is still ignored, and the arrangement by production sequence rather than by date sequence makes a given coin (non-coin?) harder to locate in the text. Die-descriptions are available for the different reverses only, but at least all obverse and reverse dies are plated, which is another first.

Grading of half cents is covered in a bit more detail than before, as the intent was to make this book a free-standing reference. The original (1971) edition referred to Sheldon's Penny Whimsy for this topic, while the second edition extracts from and augments the discussion from that book.

The caveat on condition census and rarity, "NOT ALL SPECIMENS IN EXISTENCE ARE KNOWN TO ME", is set in bold type, unmistakable by any but those few in our hobby who insist on using any published rarity-estimate-- even a fifty-year-old one-- to justify their hype of a given coin.

Two new chapters are included: one on "A short history of half cent collecting", and another on "The art of acquiring half cents". Both are written in the same folksy style that made both of Sheldon's cent books and Cohen's first half cent book an instant success.

Cohen remains the accepted authority on half cents. This comes not from knowing more than anyone else, but from freely sharing more in a field where information was considered as private property for too many years. After a decade, his second edition was due and is a bargain at any price.